PRRC emerging trends

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Only One American in Nine Expresses No Religious Preference

Most people in this country express a religious preference, and for the great majority that preference is the Christian faith, according to the findings of more than 40,000 interviews conducted by Gallup throughout 1991.

Nine adults in 10 (89 percent) single out a religious faith or denomination as their preference. The predominant faith is Christianity (82 percent).

A majority of Americans (56 percent) reported that one of the many Protestant denominations in this country is their preference.

One person in four (25 percent) is a Roman Catholic by choice. An additional 1 percent are members of an orthodox catholic faith such as the Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox Churches.

Just 2 percent of the population are Jewish. Only two-tenths of 1 percent of the total population are Muslims, and just one-tenth of 1 percent hold Hindu beliefs.

One person in 10 (11 percent) has no religious preference. This should not be interpreted as meaning that they have no religious beliefs, because past surveys have consistently demonstrated that only about 5 percent of Americans maintain they are atheists or agnostics.

Religious Preference — 1991

Christian	82%
Protestant	56
Roman Catholic	25
Orthodox Catholic	1
Jewish	2
Muslim	0.2
Hindu	0.1
No preference	11

The South is a Protestant stronghold, with 71 percent of its population naming one of the Protestant denominations as their preference. While Protestants also predominate in the Midwest (57 percent), their presence is somewhat lighter in the West (49 percent) and East (41 percent).

Catholics are most numerous in the East where they account for 40 percent of the population. One person in four (27 percent) in the Midwest is a Catholic, but there are fewer Catholics in the West (22 percent) and South (13 percent).

Members of the Jewish faith are most often found in East (4 percent), but account for 2 percent or less of the population elsewhere.

Preference for Protestantism increases as people grow older. Under age 30, 45 percent of the population name it as their preference, but by age 50 the proportion preferring a Protestant denomination increases to 64 percent. The reverse pattern is true for Roman Catholics, with 29 percent of those under age 30 naming it as their preference, but by age 50, just 23 percent still hold to the Catholic faith.

The religious preferences of whites closely mirror the national averages, but blacks are much more likely to prefer a Protestant denomination (72 percent) than to be Catholics (10 percent) or Jews (less than 1 percent).

Catholics (10 percent) and Jews (4 percent) often are found among the affluent. Many Jews also are college graduates (5 percent). Protestants, while attracting a majority of people from most sectors of society, often appeal more to those who are not affluent (60 percent) and who are less well educated (63 percent).

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PROFILE OF MAJOR FAITHS IN THE U.S.

What is your religious preference — Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or an Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Jewish
NATIONAL	56%	25%	2%
Gender			
Male	52	25	2
Female	58	25	2
Age			
18–29	45	29	2
30–49	54	25	2
50 and older	64	23	2
Education			
College graduate	51	25	5
Attended college	52	27	2
High school graduate	58	26	1
Non-high school grad	63	20	1
Race			
White	55	26	2
Non-white	59	20	*
Black	72	10	*
Region			
East	41	40	4
Midwest	57	27	1
South	71	13	1
West	49	22	1

*Less than one-half of 1 percent.

It is important to bear in mind that these percentages are based on preference, not membership and thus can be expected to be higher or lower than official membership figures.

The findings are based on personal and telephone interviews conducted among a nationwide representative sample of 41,761 adults, age 18 and older, conducted throughout 1991, by the Gallup Organization.

Dissatisfaction with American Morals and Charity

Americans generally take great pride in their country, but when it comes to matters of ethics, standards, and charity, they frequently express dissatisfaction.

In the flush of victory in the Persian Gulf nine Americans in 10 (91 percent), say they are satisfied with our defense capability, and over three in four (78 percent) have pride in the nation.

Further signs of feeling good about our strength include satisfaction with American science and technology (73 percent), our position in the world (64 percent), and with the quality of American products (50 percent). In addition, majorities endorse the way democracy is functioning in this country (60 percent), the way the country is being governed (58 percent), and the level of culture (57 percent).

People are divided on civil rights with 46 percent expressing satisfaction with this country's efforts and 50 percent saying they are dissatisfied.

Greatest dissent centers on matters of morality and the heart.

Only one person in three is satisfied with the ethics and moral standards of the American people.

Just one person in four expresses satisfaction with the honesty and standards of behavior of the people in this country.

When it comes to our ability to care for the poor and needy. only 15 percent of Americans say they are satisfied.

The findings are based on 1,003 interviews conducted by Gallup with a nationwide sample of adults, 18 and older, in the period of May 23–26, 1991.

Satisfaction with Elements of American Life

Question: *Now here are some questions about whether you are satisfied or dissatisfied with various things about America today. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following: the ethics and moral standards of the American people; the honesty and standards of behavior of people in this country today; the ability of this nation to take care of its poor and needy.*

	Ethics and morals		Honesty and standards		Care for the poor and needy	
	Sat-isfied	Dis-satisfied	Sat-isfied	Dis-satisfied	Sat-isfied	Dis-satisfied
NATIONAL	**33%**	**64%**	**24%**	**73%**	**15%**	**83%**
Gender						
Male	39	58	28	70	19	79
Female	29	68	20	76	11	87
Age						
Under 30	36	63	24	76	13	86
30 – 49	37	61	29	69	15	85
50 & older	28	67	18	76	16	79
Region						
East	30	66	21	75	11	86
Midwest	32	66	23	72	13	85
South	35	60	24	74	20	78
West	35	63	26	73	13	86
Race						
White	33	64	24	73	15	83
Black	34	62	25	73	12	88
Education						
College graduate	32	66	31	67	20	79
College incomplete	36	62	26	61	17	82
High school graduate	31	67	20	77	11	87
Non-high school grad	39	54	19	76	14	81
Religious preference						
Protestant	33	64	23	74	17	80
Catholic	38	58	25	72	13	86

"No opinion " (2 – 3 percent, nationally) is not shown.

Campaign 1992

Political-Religious Profile

Every four years journalists and political pundits show a renewed interest in religion — at least in the religious beliefs and manifestations of those vying for the presidency of the United States.

Campaign '92 has been quiet so far in this respect, but in anticipation of religious comparisons we present the accompanying table that outlines the religious beliefs and practices of American voters.

The most striking comparison between Republicans and Democrats is the *lack* of meaningful differences.

Republicans still tend to be Protestants, but a majority of Democrats also are counted among the Protestant faithful. The Democrats can no longer count on winning the majority of the Catholic vote, because the G.O.P. has succeeded in attracting many Catholics to its ranks.

Republicans and Democrats are almost identical in their religious behavior as measured by attendance and church membership. Democrats, however, are slightly more likely than Republicans to say that religion is very important in their lives.

Many Republicans and Democrats feel religion is relevant to modern life, and both express positive confidence in the church or organized religion.

Political independents are somewhat less likely to be church members and to consider religion very important in their lives. Accordingly, they also tend lack confidence in organized religion and are less likely to feel religion is relevant in the modern world. Independents also are the group most likely to view the Bible as totally human in origin.

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Preference			
Christian	88%	85%	76%
Protestant	62	56	60
Roman Catholic	24	27	25
Orthodox Catholic	1	1	1
Jewish	1	3	2
No preference	7	8	16
Church member	72	73	60
Attended services last week	45	46	47
Importance of religion to self			
Very important	59	64	51
Fairly important	30	25	32
Not very important	11	10	17
Influence of religion in America			
Increasing	38	37	34
Decreasing	54	55	57
Relevance of religion			
Answers modern problems	64	63	54
Too old-fashioned	21	22	27
Great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the church	63	61	48
Biblical beliefs			
Literalist	35	37	24
Inspired Word of God	50	48	44
Bible is only the work of man	13	12	24

Majority Feel Religion Is Losing Its Influence in America

For the first time in 16 years, a majority of people believe that religion is losing its influence on American life. In three surveys taken throughout 1991, 55 percent of population said religion is losing its influence. Just 36 percent saw an increase, while 9 percent either saw no change or held no opinion on the matter.

When Gallup first polled people on this question in 1957, two Americans in three (69 percent) felt religion was increasing its influence on their country. But estimates of religion's impact soon declined rapidly. By 1965 only one person in three (33 percent) still believed it was increasing its impact. The low point occurred during the social upheavals of 1970, when just 14 percent saw an increase in influence, while three people in four (75 percent) felt religion was losing its impact.

In the middle of the 1980s decade the influence was felt to be gaining, and estimates of religion increasing its impact rose to 49 percent in 1985. Later in the decade the yearly estimates dropped to the current level of 36 percent or slightly lower.

Middle-aged Americans are among those most likely to feel that religion is increasing its influence in this country (41 percent). As 30 to 49 are the ages when many people also begin to become most active in the church, these positive opinions may in part be a reflection of their own increased involvement. Among those under 30, only 32 percent share the opinion that religion's influence is increasing, while 62 percent say it is losing influence. Older people, 50 and older, are somewhat less in agreement (55 percent) that religion is losing its influence, while 34 percent see a gain.

Residents of the South (38 percent) and West (39 percent) are somewhat more likely than those in the East or Midwest (34 percent, each) to see religion gaining in influence. Also more optimistic in viewing religion as gaining are women (39 percent) and non-whites (38 percent).

In an election year when commentators and analysts start paying greater attention to the religious orientation of presidential hopefuls, it should be noted that there is very little difference in the perceptions of the influence religion according to political orientation. Republicans (38 percent) and Democrats (37 percent) are statistically tied in believing religion is gaining influence. They are only slightly more likely than those who declare themselves to be independents, to hold this belief (34 percent).

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN AMERICA — TREND

	Increasing	Losing
1991	36%	55%
1990	33	48
1989	33	49
1988	36	49
1986	48	39
1985	49	39
1980	45	36
1975	39	51
1970	14	75
1965	33	45
1957	69	14

PROFILE

	Gaining influence	Losing influence
NATIONAL	36%	55%
Gender		
Male	34	56
Female	39	54
Age		
18–29	32	62
30–49	41	52
50 & older	34	55
Education		
College grad	37	53
Attended college	40	54
H.S. grad	36	58
Non-grad	35	53
Race		
White	36	55
Non-white	38	58
Religious preference		
Protestant	39	54
Catholic	34	60
Political preference		
Republican	38	54
Democrat	37	55
Independent	34	57
Region		
East	34	57
Midwest	34	57
South	38	54
West	39	52

Announcing 1992 Religion in America Report

The soon to be published **Religion in America Report** marks the 25th anniversary of the initiation of these regular and eagerly-awaited publications, which present facts and interpretations of the latest trends in religious beliefs and practices, as well as the public's changing views on the impact of religion on society.

Many of the indicators reported have become the basic standard measurements of organized religion in the United States.

This report will present a detailed analysis of church attendance and membership by key population groups, and by major faiths and denominations. A special commentary by George Gallup, Jr. will set forth the major challenges and growing opportunities facing churches in the immediate years ahead.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find this PRRC publication to be a constant aid in your mission.

Special pre-publication offer: Those who order **Religion in America, 1992** before May 1, will also receive a free copy of **100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America.** Written by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones, this book contains 100 of the most important questions we have surveyed in the area of religion.

This book, which represents the distillation of many recent Gallup surveys, deals in depth with each of 100 topics – analysis by key demographic groups, trends, background information and tables. Selections include religious belief and ethics, religion and politics, religious experience and spiritual development and commitment.

To receive **Religion in America 1992** and your complimentary copy of **100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America** send your check or money order for $30 to Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542.

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